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ABSTRACT

Aspects of nonverbal communication are examined as they relate to business communication and to the instruction of business language. Relevant literature on nonverbal communication is reviewed, focusing on gestures and body language and the problems inherent in interpretation of their meaning. Suggestions for educators include: training students to make observations of the differences in foreign cultures so they can modify their own behavior; teaching prospective sojourners abroad to behave with empathy and respect; and helping students build the necessary mechanisms for adjustment in real cultural situations. Specific classroom techniques for developing these abilities are described, including mini-dramas, simulated telephone calls, and pantomime. Fifty-two references are appended. (MSE)

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THE FIFTH SKILL: HEARING THE UNSPOKEN LANGUAGE

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The Fifth Skill: Hearing the Unspoken Language

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss how a particular community uses time, or moves, or conceives space but to illustrate the many metalinguistic aspects of language discussed in a variety of studies on non-verbal communication.

This paper will be given from the perspective not only of a language teacher but also that of a former public relations executive who became involved in the culture concept partly because of what she discovered and learned dealing with people of many cultures, and partly because of what she experienced when trying to adjust herself to a new culture. Also, because she feels that, as a native speaker of Spanish, she has a commitment towards the students and the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language.

The limitations for this study were great. First, the vast bibliography available made it impossible to review each one of the materials. Second, because of the variety of gestures that we humans can generate, to try to analyze them all in relation to the different cultures of the world could be an extremely difficult task. Last, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to study each one of the methods for cross-cultural training and non-verbal communication sensitizing.

The goal was to put together, in an eclectic way, the different aspects of non-verbal communication, narrowing it to how

it affects us as 'Teachers of Language for Business and the Professions'. To prepare our students for both, language ability and cross-cultural understanding will redound to the benefit of the individuals and of the companies that hire them.

Communication is established among humans in two modes, verbal and non-verbal. Non-verbal communication, the unspoken language, is a complex system of sending messages that may or may not be accompanied by words and, what is more important, may or may not be used intentionally or consciously; sometimes it may lie beneath and go beyond the level of awareness.

According to Birdwhistell (1970), verbal language seems to occupy just one third of our means of communication and the other three parts are filled by non-verbal language.[1]

Language, verbal and non-verbal, differs significantly from one culture to another. Although some features can be universally recognized, some others can be recognized only by natives of that culture; but certain others can have several different interpretations. The lack of awareness of the latter is what will cause a barrier to effective communication. As Hayes (1972) says, "if the signals that accompany messages are not properly received and sent, communication is impeded".[2]

A great number of studies have been carried out to investigate the linguistic and non-linguistic signs. It was Saussure (1955) who introduced the idea of the two sides of the linguistic

sign, the "signifié and the "signifiant".[3]

French semiologists Barthes and Greimas directed their studies towards the social forms that function in the manner of a language. According to Barthes (1968), any semiologic system accompanies language[4], which implies that it is non-verbal communication the one that is complemented by verbal expression.

In America, Carnap and Morris formulated several distinctions in relation to the sign. Morris (1971) distinguishes three dimensions of a sign: semantic, that which relates 'symbol' and 'referent'; syntactic, that between signs themselves; pragmatic, how signs and symbols are used by man as a manner of language.[5]

Some studies have concentrated on the patterns of communication (e.g. Izard 1971, Johnson 1975, Haney 1979), or have been carried out to investigate social and interpersonal relationships (e.g. Ardrey 1970, Ascraft 1976, Bull 1983) while others (e.g. Feldman 1959, Birdwhistell, Fast 1970, Critchley 1971, Morris 1977 and 1979, Gorham 1985) describe non-verbal communication in terms of distribution, environment, behavioral patterns, and neurology of signs. Most have focused on cross-cultural differences and have described the difference between intentional and instinctive aspects of non-verbal 'language'. Only a few studies have been directly related to the importance of non-verbal communication in business and trade, or in other aspects such as teaching and education, although several studies involve inter-cultural awareness (e.g. Brault 1962, Allison, Green,

Nieremberg 1968, Hayes 1972, Niemi 1976, Bonoma 1977, Rose 1978, Wolfgang 1979, Green 1982, Curt 1983 and 1984, Waltman 1984, Seelye 1985). Finally, since the first bibliography of 'gestures' by Hayes in 1957, several other bibiliographies about non-verbal communication have been published (e.g. Bäuml 1975, Wylie 1977, Rasberry 1979, Davis et al. 1982).

The most common classification of non-verbal language relates to how it is 'spoken', how the messages are sent. During conversation our brain not only receives and sends messages via sound vibrations but also via body movements, categorized as "emblems" by Ekman et al., Bull, and others, or as "actions" by Morris. These movements are physical acts performed by certain parts of our body, gestures that can involve only one part of the body (such as head, face, eyes) but which generally occur in combinations.[6] In Birdwhistell (1970) we find a division of the body into eight sections which conform to movement with message: "head and face, trunk and shoulders, arm and wrist, hands and fingers, hips, legs, ankles and feet, and neck."[7]

Each event has its own linguistic and paralinguistic message which is linked to our special way of reacting to emotions. It depends on how neurophysiological information is processed, on how the two hemispheres of the brain interact. Neurological research provides us with information on how our brain works. The task of the right hemisphere (left side of the body) is to process emotions, abstract and symbolic meanings, and synthetic

messages; that is, paralinguistic cues are encoded and decoded on the right brain hemisphere. The left hemisphere (right side of the body) controls verbal speech, analytic processes, and linear and sequential ordering.[8] Trotter, as well as others, seems to be saying that the dichotomy of the brain hemispheres can be linked to the way societies of the world behave. It seems that, according to this idea, Western European societies would be dominated by the left brain hemisphere while Mediterranean, African, and Caribbean peoples would be dominated by the right brain hemisphere.

In reviewing the distribution of meaning of certain gestures studied by D. Morris (1979), there is a sense of parallelism, if not to the direct reference of which hemisphere of the brain controls certain societies, certainly to Trotter's classification of society-brain hemisphere distribution. It is important to notice how a gesture such as "The Eyelid Pull" can have two contrasted meanings ("I am alert"/"Be alert") which will be found in contrastive distribution of usage. The "I am alert" meaning is located from France to Scotland crossing Northern Europe, whereas the "Be alert" meaning is located from Spain throughout the Mediterranean area, although there were several zones of mixture of meanings.[9]

The difficulties in suggesting a theory of interpreting non-verbal acts lie in the fact that there are psychological variables which will modify the codes according to context. Ges-

tures, as a way of transmitting messages, can be divided in two main groups: one, innate expressions of fundamental emotions which are universally recognized, such as those of sorrow, joy, fear, surprise, anger, etc., and two, learned gestures which carry specific symbolic meanings and are the "most difficult to recognize because their origins have been obscured."[10]

To observe and perceive gestures is easy, although certain gestures are more easily recognized than others (e.g. facial and hand gestures), but it is necessary to interpret them without being influenced by our own culturally-learned feelings which, usually, will not correlate with those of the foreign situation.

What are the implications for educators? It is important to understand and be aware of the factors which impede cross-cultural communication. We must try to sensitize our students to the differences in foreign cultures so that they are trained to make their own observations and to modify their own behavior. We must make use of media materials to assist us in cross-cultural communication. There are excellent resources which provide a vast array of topics to discuss and behaviors to mime. Among them, TV commercials are an excellent way of viewing 'others' realities' because commercials sometimes emphasize stereotypes and those, when not seen as such, act as a barrier to effective communication. Stereotyping reduces complex entities to a simple two-value system 'either good or bad' and the discussion of a

certain stereotyped action will enhance cross-cultural awareness.

For our students, cross-cultural differences are as difficult as phonetics. Gestures, as well as words, occur in groups and have their own system of combinations. If an Anglo speaker learning Spanish has difficulty in mastering a non-gliding sound when pronouncing the Spanish first person singular personal pronoun "YO", he will encounter as much difficulty when trying to master 'gazing patterns' of Spanish speakers withou feeling uneasy.

Different perceptions of reality are communicated through both verbal and non-verbal modes, but the non-verbal are more susceptible to misinformation in general, as many signs can bear more than one interpretation --just as words can have more than one meaning, even contradictory at times. Some signs --the obvious ones-- will be recognizable, but aome others --the hidden-- will be appreciated by few people. The absence of familiar non-verbal cues when two cultures come into contact is one of the reasons for what is known as 'culture shock'. Sometimes, it is not 'cultural shock' that can be suffered but what Seelye calls "cross-cultural fatigue",[11] meaning that fatigue caused by having to work harder to do the simplest things and having to deal with people who 'do not understand'.

How does one avoid some of the communication barriers that can occur? Some approaches to non-verbal conflicts have to be viewed from the perspective of comprehension and understanding.

First, we have to think that 'travelers' problems' are not different from those of 'sojourners', although natives expect temporary residents in their country to be different yet, to understand better than travelers. Still, temporary residents should not try to behave just like natives if they do not want to be considered 'suspicious'. Second, we should approach other cultures with empathy, using a non-judgemental position, far from our narrow cultural perspective. Third, we should be respectfully and calmly tolerant in order to avoid hostilities from arising or frustrations from impeding the accomplishment of our goals.

Everybody in business knows that the language of trade (national or international) is the language of the customer --but not necessarily the spoken language.!

As teachers, we should plan our general objectives for how to train our students. The challenge is not 'to be aware' but, once one is aware of the non-verbal language, how to deal with its 'idiomatic' expressions. To tell our students that in Africa they should not use their left hand for social purposes or that the soles of their shoes should not be exposed in Arab countries is not enough to achieve self-actualization on the part of the student. To share articles such as that of Alsop (1960), no matter how autobiographical they may be, is a good source for teaching, but it is certainly not enough. We have to help our students build up the necessary mechanisms of adjustment which will

be needed when they have to deal with the 'real situation' that is, with the interaction in the foreign culture. It is a matter of 'socialization' into the new culture which does not necessarily run parallel to fluency in the spoken language; on the contrary, fluency in the spoken language sometimes serves as a barrier because it creates a false idea among the host people that 'we' have acquired 'cultural fluency' as well.

Let us explore some ways teachers can help improve non-verbal fluency for business communication and overall communication in foreign languages.

There are many techniques for teaching that can help to sensitize students to cross-cultural miscommunication. Hoopes (1979) offers a whole range of valuable information on training interaction in the foreign language classroom. Gorden (1968) and Fersh (1974) have developed a prototype 'mini-drama' that help students by forcing them to 'feel' the vagueness due to different cultural connotations of words. A similar project can be implemented to make students experience the misunderstandings in non-verbal communication. When we use 'mini-dramas' in class, each episode has to be well rounded; instructions have to be very precise and clear; the teacher is required to have an extensive background in the non-verbal signs related to the culture of the language that is being taught; video-taping the in-class activity is necessary in order to be able to carry out a discussion later on. Each student in the class should have a role. The

'actors' should be given their role just before the performance but with enough time to put themselves into action. There should be a kind of self-confrontation in order to simulate reality. The other students should be given instructions on where to focus their attention, and one student should act as the narrator who introduces the scene but who does not solve the problem.

The Telephone Call
Mr. T., an American business man, is in Spain and phones the company he wants to visit to arrange a meeting with the general manager. Miss P., the secretary, answers the phone and makes the arrangements, but, as they do not suit Mr. T's plans, he tries to convince her to accept his own conditions.

The 'mini-drama' has to be performed as a pantomime, using only gestures. Students A and B, the actors, should not be present in class when the narrator tells the story. Student A will be given a list (drawings included if necessary to avoid personal emotions from interfering) with the gestures he is to perform; so will student B, although A and B should not know each other's gestures. Each of the other students will be assigned to pay attention to a different part of the body, write down what types of movements he sees, and the meaning that he perceives. The video-recording of the scene will be used to analyze the variety of non-verbal messages that have been sent by both 'actors' and contrasted with those perceived by the other memebers in the class. In the particular case of the telephone call, hand and face will be sending the highest amount of mes-

sages. Specific gestures such as ways of counting with fingers, dialing the numbers on the telephone, expressing apology, giving the 'OK' sign or the negation, etc. are the ones that will have to be expressed by the 'actors' and decoded by the 'expectators'. The decoding of cues is expected to be affected by personal, unconscious emotions, and the teacher will act as mere intermediary between the 'actors' and the 'receivers' of the culturally differentiated gestures to be discussed. As Kirch (1979) says, "if our objective is to teach communication in a foreign language we cannot restrict ourselves to the verbal system alone, but we must also pay attention to the non-verbal systems of the foreign culture, too."[18]

As non-verbal communication is a culturally differentiated process, verbal and non-verbal languages have to be integrated as a whole to make them applicable to business situation. When we talk of language competence and performance, we should also include 'ethnic competence', a kind of cultural awareness of one's own culture as well as that of others', or the development of a fifth skill: hearing the unspoken language.

Notes

1. Birdwhistell, R.L. (1970)
2. Hayes, A.S. (1972)
3. Saussure, F. de (1955)
4. Barthes, R. (1968)
5. Morris, C. W. (1971)
6. Morris, D. (1977)
7. Birdwhistell, R.L. (1970)
8. Trotter, R.J. (1976)

9. Morris, D. (1979)
10. Morris, D. (1977)
11. Seelye, N.H. (1985)
12. Kirch, M.S. (1979)

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